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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Forty-second session

Report of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection

1. The Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection met on 3 October 1991 under the chairmanship of His Excellency Mr. Emeka Ayo Azikiwe of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The following agenda was adopted:

- (1) Report of the Working Group on Solutions and Protection (EC/SCP/64);
- (2) Resettlement as an Instrument of Protection: Traditional Problems in Achieving this Durable Solution and New Directions in the 1990s (EC/SCP/65);
- (3) The Safe Country Concept and Refugee Status (EC/SCP/68);
- (4) Any other business;
- (5) Adoption of the report to the Executive Committee.

Report of the Working Group on Solutions and Protection

2. The report of the Working Group on Solutions and Protection (document EC/SCP/64) was introduced by the Working Group's Chairman, Ambassador Morland (United Kingdom). Ambassador Morland circulated a short introductory summary covering the mandate of the Working Group, its methods and scope of work and the content of its report. He said that two of the underlying themes of Working Group discussions had been the proper scope and direction of UNHCR activities and the search for practical solutions to refugee problems. As to the former, more work was needed. A key role for the High Commissioner in relation to the latter was promoting dialogue between States and devising imaginative measures to facilitate return. An important concern remained the responsibilities of States for their own citizens. Voluntary repatriation was encouraged and UNHCR and asylum countries could benefit through a re-alignment of expenditure from care and maintenance towards solutions. Another important

issue, he said, had been the increase in manifestly unfounded claims which was undermining the asylum system and threatening protection to refugees. When an asylum-seeker is found not to be a refugee, it was a decision for the receiving State whether or not to allow him or her to stay. The Working Group recognized, said Ambassador Morland, that UNHCR should give its support to repatriation when satisfied with the procedures.

3. Ambassador Morland added that some issues under discussion in the Working Group went beyond the capacity of the Group to come up with any comprehensive strategy, including particularly the problems of the internally displaced. In this connection questions of national sovereignty had been a concern, even while the Group recognized the severity of the plight of the internally displaced and the possibility that such persons would cross borders, with implications for neighbouring countries and the international community generally. Another issue the Working Group discussed was the question of emergency response and recommended better coordination between UN agencies and improved financial provisions and standby capacity. As to UNHCR's relationship with other agencies, Ambassador Morland noted that this was one of the issues discussed also during the 1990 Temporary Working Group exercise, but it remained a fundamental issue. UNHCR was making good progress here. In addition, refugee issues were increasingly prominent on the agendas of other international bodies.

4. In the ensuing debate, many delegations welcomed the Working Group's report as a valuable, comprehensive and well-balanced basis for ongoing discussion on important issues affecting protection, assistance and solutions for refugees and other displaced groups. The able chairmanship of Ambassador Morland was widely commended, and he, the Rapporteur (Dr. Mahiga, United Republic of Tanzania), all participating delegations and UNHCR were all praised for their combined efforts in producing a most useful report, as well as for the spirit of cooperation which prevailed during the Working Group's meetings and those of the Friends of the Rapporteur.

5. A number of delegations made the point that the report was a consensus text which basically reflected the concerns of participating delegations on important matters. Many also suggested the report should be adopted by the Executive Committee and that provision should be made for follow-up both on matters raised in the Report and its conclusions, as well as on other protection issues generally.

6. A number of other delegations stressed that the report, while a positive and important contribution to further consideration of major refugee and protection issues, inevitably reflected compromise positions on important matters and could not, therefore, necessarily be said to meet all concerns of all participating delegations. Some also suggested in this connection that the report should be received or accepted with appreciation, but not necessarily, at this point, adopted in its entirety. Issues in it should, though, they felt, be actively followed up.

7. Several delegations suggested that an appropriate follow-up mechanism would be inter-sessional meetings of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection. One delegation felt that the Working Group itself should be reconvened to continue its important work.

8. In commenting generally on matters covered in the report, a number of delegations stressed the seriousness of the refugee problem today and the need for a comprehensive approach to be adopted by the international community

which balanced a number of concerns. It was suggested that this approach should take into account the extensive experience accumulated in regions around the world which were experiencing large refugee exoduses. One delegation felt that such a comprehensive approach needed to blend, in particular, humanitarian and human rights considerations, as well as foreign policy, immigration and development perspectives.

9. In commenting on the need for new approaches, one delegation noted the parallels between issues covered in the Working Group report and proposals in UNHCR's Note on International Protection concerning new directions for UNHCR protection activities. In particular, the delegation commended the emphasis in both documents on prevention as the preferable solution. Many other delegations also underlined the significance of strengthened activities in the area of prevention, including for UNHCR, either as catalyst or actor.

10. Many delegations commented on the complexity of causes of movements of people. One delegation was not convinced of the causal relationship between economic development and refugee flows. A number stressed that human rights violations were a primary cause of refugee movements and that there was a need to strengthen mechanisms to promote and protect human rights. One delegation underlined that human rights included both civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Another delegation called for close cooperation between UNHCR and human rights bodies, including particularly the Commission on Human Rights and the Centre for Human Rights, in an effort to improve monitoring and evaluation of human rights situations generating refugee flows. That delegation felt a conclusion on this was warranted. At the same time it encouraged UNHCR to participate actively in the preparatory work of the 1993 United Nations World Conference on Human Rights.

11. Other delegations noted that causes of refugee flows included, but went beyond, human rights violations. In particular many refugees were the result of external and internal armed conflict and aggression. There was a need for the international community to work on the humanitarian front, but also on the front of inter-State relations, using as the basis the principles of peaceful co-existence between States, which needed to be promoted and developed. One delegation called for a deeper examination of the question of legal international protection for persons falling outside the 1951 Convention. Another delegation noted that the regime applicable to victims of persecution differed, particularly as regards protection and solutions, from the regime applicable to other categories.

12. The causes and the problems of internal displacement were an additional important focus for many delegations. They stressed the seriousness of the problems of the internally displaced and their need for protection and assistance. In this connection, a number of delegations also drew attention to the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity as having a particular application when it came to assistance and protection of the internally displaced. Many delegations generally called for a more coherent system at the international level to enable a comprehensive response to the problems of internal displacement. One delegation noted in this regard that the problem is not one of paucity of international law, but rather inadequate adherence to human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Several delegations noted the interlinkage between assisting returnees and assisting internally displaced persons. A number stressed that voluntary repatriation was the preferred and best solution in most refugee situations, even while other durable solutions remained current in certain particular circumstances. In all cases, one delegation pointed out, solutions and protection were inseparable notions.

13. Several delegations referred to the need to address more actively problems inherent in mass movements. Some delegations noted that existing international legal instruments were directed at individual, not mass situations and that there was a need to develop policy to relate to and cope with such situations rapidly and effectively. One delegation suggested that there were lessons to be learned from the international community's response to the Albanian outflow. Assistance to the people, concerted international action to address root causes and flexible eligibility procedures were all stressed in this connection.

14. A number of delegations noted the serious strain under which refugee determination systems had come because of the growing migratory component in the flow of asylum-seekers. Several drew particular attention to the need to establish accelerated procedures, in particular for manifestly unfounded claims. The need to deal expeditiously with abusive applicants was emphasized in this connection. One delegation stressed, though, that access to procedures should be guaranteed, and that the legitimate concerns of genuine refugees had to be kept foremost in mind.

15. Several delegations made specific reference to particular recommendations of the Working Group which they felt required some clarification or further development. Several delegations mentioned in particular Recommendation (c) and underlined that further study on globalizing the OAU/Cartagena definition should be undertaken. A couple of delegations said it must be on the basis that the scope of the 1951 Convention definition was not at issue. Other delegations felt that there were a number of open questions concerning this recommendation including whether these definitions remained of regional, or were of broader, application. A number of delegations felt that Recommendation (g) and in particular sub-paragraphs 1 and 3, needed further development. One delegation pointed out that Articles 32 and 33 of the 1951 Convention did not articulate a right of asylum. Several other delegations noted the need to go more deeply into measures to prevent misuse of national status determination procedures, as well as activities to promote return of rejected asylum-seekers. Recommendation (a) of the Report also attracted comment. One delegation felt that UNHCR had a natural responsibility to promote harmonization of interpretation and implementation of the international refugee instruments and should take new initiatives to this end. A number of delegations commented on the need generally to strengthen protection for Convention refugees. Further to Recommendation (n) some delegations underlined the need actively to promote further accessions to international legal instruments for the protection of stateless persons, and the desirability of greater involvement of United Nations human rights bodies with their problems.

16. Responding to the debate, the Director of International Protection expressed appreciation for the discussions of the Working Group and of the Sub-Committee, which were extremely useful to the Office as it considered new directions. He greatly admired the spirit of cooperation which had characterized the Working Group and warmly welcomed the report.

17. He very much agreed that several issues deserved further discussion, among them the mechanisms to strengthen protection for Convention refugees and for other categories of people; internally displaced persons; preventive activity; and the question of return. Many of these issues, among others, had also been raised in the Note on International Protection, going as they did to the core of UNHCR's activities. He hoped that a number would be addressed during discussions in the Plenary.

18. At the conclusion of the discussion on this item, the Sub-Committee recommended that the Executive Committee adopt the following decision on the Report of the Working Group on Solutions and Protection.

The Executive Committee,

Accepting with appreciation the Report of the Working Group on Solutions and Protection (document EC/SCP/64);

(a) Decided to request the High Commissioner to convene such inter-sessional meetings of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection as may be necessary to continue the constructive discussions on pending issues of the Report of the Working Group, as well as on other relevant protection matters, and to seek consensus on action-oriented follow-up, as appropriate, of the Report, its recommendations, and the other relevant matters.

(b) Recognised the possibility, in this connection, for the Sub-Committee to utilise outside expertise as appropriate.

(c) Decided further to request the High Commissioner to report to the Executive Committee at its forty-third session on progress in the deliberations of the Sub-Committee.

Resettlement as an Instrument of Protection: Traditional Problems in Achieving this Durable Solution and New Directions in the 1990s

19. In his introductory comments, the Director of International Protection observed that resettlement remains an important durable solution, which is restricted predominantly to Convention or mandate refugees and is pursued as a last resort. Over the past 15 years, the Office has had problems in finding sufficient places for persons in need of resettlement, but recently there have been encouraging signs. The Director noted that the paper outlined the traditional problems facing resettlement as well as new directions foreseen for the 1990s. He expressed hope that governments would understand that resettlement needs will vary due to evolving refugee situations, that they can be counted on to respond flexibly and rapidly to the emergency protection cases and needs of vulnerable groups, and that they will bear in mind that protection elements should take precedence over immigration concerns.

20. A number of delegations expressed their appreciation of UNHCR's thoughtful and realistic appraisal of resettlement as an instrument of protection in the 1990s. Some delegations mentioned that they were among the ten resettlement countries with established resettlement quotas and one delegation noted that it had raised its quota this year. Several governments announced that they were already very flexible in responding to fluctuating needs and others mentioned that they already had contingency reserves within their resettlement programmes. Several countries called upon other states to offer annual quotas in the interest of international burden-sharing. One delegation noted that even if it did not establish a quota in the same manner as the other ten countries, it did offer consideration on the basis of individual submissions, especially of emergency cases. Some delegations pointed to the growing number of asylum-seekers as limiting the capacity of States to provide resettlement places. Several delegations emphasized that they had humanitarian programmes which complemented their refugee admission programmes.

21. Certain countries suggested more concrete guidelines should be agreed upon and implemented while another delegation mentioned that there could be differences in the interpretation when criteria are applied. One delegation emphasized the importance of a dialogue with UNHCR on the development of criteria to delineate resettlement caseloads. Another country underscored its collaboration with UNHCR and wondered whether the Office also worked closely with other countries regarding selection missions.

22. One delegation asked for clarification on what was meant by resettlement in terms of offering a refugee a future commensurate with fundamental human rights rather than in terms of protection. A second delegation questioned why children, particularly those traumatized by war, and the elderly were not listed in the vulnerable groups category. Another delegation suggested the inclusion of unaccompanied minors on the list of vulnerable groups. Many countries placed emphasis on the resettlement of vulnerable groups.

23. In response, the Chief of Resettlement Section welcomed governments' recognition of the importance of resettlement and their understanding that recent events naturally resulted in a fluctuation in the numbers of persons in need of resettlement. He mentioned that as of mid-year there were some 30,000 persons in need of resettlement. He noted that whilst not all of these persons met the specific profiles of resettlement countries he hoped that governments would be flexible in consideration of present and future resettlement requirements. With regard to criteria he explained that UNHCR tried to be as specific as possible and also to work closely with all concerned governments. He also noted that UNHCR had come close this year with one major resettlement country to establishing a mechanism for resettlement of vulnerable groups and he hoped it would be finalized by next year. He also mentioned that efforts have been intensified in terms of coordination of several countries' selection missions.

24. The Chief of Resettlement Section pointed out that the mention of a future commensurate with fundamental human rights was intended to describe those few instances where perhaps the protection element was not as pronounced as in other instances, but where UNHCR as a humanitarian organization realized that other durable solutions were not viable. He also explained that if children and the elderly were not specifically mentioned in the vulnerable groups category it was because it was understood that they were among the priority category and that if their inclusion would clarify debate on their resettlement we would be pleased to look again at the categories and highlight them.

25. He concluded by suggesting that some of the technical questions raised be discussed in scheduled meetings with delegations and warmly thanked governments for their support.

26. At the conclusion of the discussion on this item, the Sub-Committee recommended that the Executive Committee adopt the following decision on the Report on Resettlement as an Instrument of Protection.

The Executive Committee,

Reaffirming the link between international protection and resettlement as an instrument of protection and its important role as a durable solution in specific circumstances,

- (a) Called on governments in a position to assist, to establish refugee admission ceilings, in the context of international burden sharing;
- (b) Requested States when setting refugee admission ceilings to include an adequate contingency provision which could be available depending on need to address rapidly evolving situations;
- (c) Recognized that rapidly evolving situations can result in fluctuating resettlement requirements from one year to another and that admission ceilings should be adaptable to such developments;
- (d) Recognized the need for rapid and flexible response to UNHCR resettlement requirements in particular for vulnerable groups and emergency protection cases subject to refugee admission requirements of receiving States;
- (e) Acknowledged the utility of close consultation with UNHCR in the resettlement activities of the Office;
- (f) Recognized that in reviewing UNHCR resettlement requests the protection element inherent in such requests should be taken into account;
- (g) Emphasized that UNHCR pursues resettlement only as a last resort, when neither voluntary repatriation nor local integration is possible, when it is in the best interests of the refugees and where appropriate.

The Safe Country Concept and Refugee Status

27. In introducing this agenda item, the Director of International Protection explained that the term "safe country" was applied in relation both to countries of origin and to countries of asylum, and that both usages have given rise to controversy. The Office appreciated the need for mechanisms allowing a fair sharing of responsibilities of States to protect refugees, in full respect of their rights and needs. With respect to safe countries of origin, the Office recognized that the concept can be a useful device in status determination procedures, and can also send a message to non-refugees who may seek to use the asylum mechanism for immigration purposes. It cannot, however, be the basis for automatic discrimination based on nationality. The Office saw value in the concept, but cautioned strongly against its misuse to bar individuals from procedures. Another point to emphasize was that the notion could be applied only where safety is measurable against stringent and objectively assessable criteria. Concerning the concept as it related to countries of asylum, the Office appreciated the need for mechanisms to share the burden of determining asylum claims. Against this background, the Director said the issue had been put on the agenda to air both the utility of the notion and the cautions which should accompany its use. He expressed hope that the Executive Committee would identify guidelines and safeguards on when to use the concept and on what criteria it should be based.

28. Many delegations commended UNHCR for preparing a valuable and carefully balanced paper which showed the complexity of the issues and could be used as a basis for further discussion. They agreed that debate on the issue was timely and should be ongoing, possibly in an inter-sessional meeting of the Sub-Committee, and perhaps after the deliberations on this topic in the Council of Europe.

29. Several delegations cautioned generally against turning safe country into a distinct legal concept. It was stressed that it was, rather, a mechanism going to distribution of responsibilities and identification of appropriate procedures for handling certain types of claims. One delegation stressed the need to approach the notion carefully, given the difficulty of assessing human rights situations. Another delegation cautioned, in this connection, against resort to country profiles to make group decisions.

30. Some delegations saw the concept as having two dimensions. First, application of the notion had a policy dimension and in particular, should be seen in the context of prevention and state responsibility. What was needed was more effective use of human rights mechanisms and development, so that there is a safe planet of safe countries. Second, the legal dimension of the concept, called for two basic requirements to be met. In putting the concept into practice, governments must guarantee fundamental standards of justice and fair treatment, while at the same time they must allow a significant number of manifestly unfounded claims to be rejected in a considerably faster asylum procedure.

A. Safe Country of Origin

31. One delegation explained that its government did not use the concept to exclude anyone from procedures, but considered an individual from a safe country to be a prima facie non-refugee, who must give convincing evidence to the contrary at a first hearing. This delegation noted that the concept was a useful management tool. Several other delegations agreed, observing that governments needed an effective filtering method to handle increasing numbers of applications in part because manifestly unfounded claims delay the process for all asylum-seekers and substantially increase costs. Delegations queried what might be the link between the safe country mechanism and mass influxes, commenting that governments needed flexible and effective procedures in such flight situations.

32. Several delegations drew particular attention to the cessation clauses of the 1951 Convention and their complementarity with the safe country notion. It was observed that certain former refugee producing countries could now be regarded as safe, which should lead to a natural and evident implementation of the cessation clause of the Convention. One delegation commented in this regard that some countries, such as the new democracies in Eastern Europe, were no longer producing refugees. Another requested that UNHCR inform the Sub-Committee of uses made of the cessation clause in recent years, and asked for information on UNHCR's role in country of origin information, since it was critical for making decisions on safe countries of origin, as well as on cessation and repatriation.

33. Concerning country of origin information, the Chief of the Centre for Documentation on Refugees responded that UNHCR had made a beginning. One question was how best to divide the labour, since some governments have already begun and have more resources to devote to the task. The Centre was concentrating on information in the public domain, and on making use of information technology. For example, UNHCR had just concluded an agreement with Hungary for on-line access to the Centre's database. He cautioned, however, that country profiles were not automatic decision-makers, but should be thought of as one means to increase efficiency in status determinations.

B. Safe Country of Asylum

34. Several delegations reaffirmed that the fundamental criterion when considering resort to the notion, was protection against refoulement. As long as it was respected, several delegations said, additional criteria were not needed. Another delegation suggested a wider approach to protection might on occasion be called for and that alternative forms of protection, such as individual petition or safe haven, needed to be explored.

35. Several delegations felt that the concept of safe country of asylum was a fundamental consideration to be taken into account before any resort to the 1951 Convention. In one delegation's view, a claimant was ipso facto disqualified from entering national status determination procedures if coming from a country where he or she was not persecuted. It was observed that all States parties undertake equal obligations under the Convention, that the Convention establishes international standards which apply equally everywhere, and that asylum-seekers should not be able to engage in forum-shopping. This view was shared by one delegation but another disagreed, stating that asylum-seekers, even from safe countries, had automatic access to status determination procedures. One delegation said it could not associate itself with two sentences in the background note, the last sentence in paragraph 12 and the last sentence in paragraph 15, since in its view, such people were disqualified by definition and did not have compelling reasons which a receiving State had to take into account not to be returned to a country of first asylum.

36. One delegation drew attention to the problem of determining at what point in time a country should be considered an asylum country. That delegation suggested that, at a minimum, a country of transit might be considered a country of first asylum if the asylum-seeker had an opportunity to be in contact with the authorities in order to lodge a request. Another delegation noted that asylum pressures demanded rationalization of processing, particularly since some asylum-seekers go through many safe countries, or lodge multiple applications.

37. One delegation sought clarification as to whether what was being aimed at was guidelines for use in national legislation for those countries who wanted it, or whether an international regime was being sought. Several delegations agreed that international agreements are not needed, and that any application of a safe country concept was a matter for domestic legislation and international immigration cooperation.

38. With respect to the specific questions put to UNHCR, the Chief of the General Legal Advice Section responded that the first sentence in paragraph 11 was a description of a practice, not promoted by UNHCR, whereby some countries contend that an asylum-seeker from a safe country of asylum should not have access to procedures.

39. As to paragraph 12, again this was a reflection of the position taken by a number of governments and indeed by the Executive Committee, that asylum should not be refused solely on the ground that it could have been sought elsewhere. Reference was made to Conclusion No. 15 paragraph (h)(iv). Similarly, the position taken in the background note that asylum-seekers should remain able to invoke circumstances militating against return to the "safe" country of asylum reflected earlier positions adopted by the Executive Committee, for example in Conclusion No. 15(k) and in Conclusion No. 58(g). Regional instruments also recognized that asylum-seekers might be justified in choosing a certain country, for example, one where they had close family members.

40. In responding to the debate on safe country of origin and safe country of asylum, the Director of International Protection noted that UNHCR had listened with great interest to all of the interventions. He agreed with most of what had been said, particularly as regards the importance of the topic. He felt that it would be prudent to continue discussing the issue further, especially since it would also be discussed in the Council of Europe, and that perhaps guidelines could be drafted later in the year. It would be useful to work out a mechanism where considerations about the safety of countries could be made on a collective basis, to be applied in a systematic and comprehensive way, both in status determination and for the application of the cessation clause. With regard to cessation, the Director commented that it was a useful and important mechanism in the Convention and in the Statute, but that it was not equivalent to the concept of safe country. The former had to do with removing someone's refugee status, while the latter concerned whether someone will be recognized as a refugee. With particular reference to Eastern Europe, he said one could consider that many refugees fall under the cessation clause. Under the Convention, this was a judgement to be made by the States parties. Under the Statute, UNHCR could and would inform colleagues in the field about cessation following recent political developments.

41. At the conclusion of the discussion of this item, the Sub-Committee recommended that the Executive Committee adopt a conclusion on this matter in its general conclusions on protection.

Any Other Business

(a) UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women

42. The Director of International Protection introduced under this sub-item document EC/SCP/67, "Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women," prepared by an expert consultant at the request of the Executive Committee. He noted that the request had been prompted by realisation that insufficient attention was being paid to the special protection needs of this vulnerable refugee group, despite their preponderance among the global refugee population. The guidelines should assist UNHCR, implementing partners and States to improve the protection of refugee women, which remained an important concern for UNHCR.

43. A number of delegations commended UNHCR for its progress in implementing the policy on refugee women, congratulated UNHCR on the excellent guidelines and expressed their support for them, and hoped that they would be implemented quickly. UNHCR was encouraged to develop specific plans in the coming year for incorporating the Guidelines into all its assistance, programme and protection activities and to ensure that each Bureau targets women's protection and assistance needs specifically. Several delegations called for regular reporting on implementation of the guidelines and recommended that the Executive Committee conduct a regular review. One delegation noted in this regard that all UNHCR data collected should be distinguished by gender.

44. Many delegations noted that women's needs and resources must be integrated and brought into the mainstream of budgeting and staffing, using the guidelines as a basis. UNHCR staff and those of implementing partners should be trained in the guidelines using present resources. The importance of including refugee women in decision-making was noted.

45. One delegation commented particularly on the elaboration in paragraph 46 of the categories of particularly vulnerable women. This delegation also thanked UNHCR for noting in the guidelines the complexity of gender as a basis for establishing a claim to refugee status. In several countries, violence against women was an acute problem and should be given more focus.

46. Several delegations noted that refugee children are also at risk of physical or sexual abuse, and suggested that their protection needs be considered in greater depth, in the Protection Sub-Committee.

47. At the conclusion of the discussion, the Sub-Committee recognised the great value of UNHCR's Guidelines on Refugee Children and on the Protection of Refugee Women, encouraged their active use by UNHCR field offices as tools in their training activities and, at the suggestion of several delegations, recommended that the Executive Committee, in the general conclusions on International Protection, highlight this together with the importance generally of adequate protection and assistance to meet the specific needs of refugee women and children.

(b) Implementation of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees

48. The Director of International Protection referred to document EC/SCP/66, "Information Note on Implementation of the 1951 Convention" which contained an interim report based on replies to the questionnaire on implementation which UNHCR had circulated to States. The reports have been, he said, of great assistance to UNHCR, but the number of replies - 23 - was disappointingly small. The Office hoped to receive more replies to the questionnaire, for the purposes of a supplementary report. The Director drew particular attention to suggestions in the covering note for more regular reporting and for wider distribution of the reports, in a manner consistent with the treatment accorded to reports under other international instruments. It could also be worthwhile to consider what mechanism would be most appropriate for resolving differences of interpretation on disputed notions.

49. With regard to implementation, a number of delegations praised the interim report as a valuable contribution to promoting better implementation of the Convention, particularly in this anniversary year. They agreed that the number of countries responding to UNHCR's questionnaire was regrettably small, and encouraged countries who had not replied to do so. One delegation commented that other reports had been due recently under other human rights instruments, and that perhaps accounted for the tardiness of some of the replies to the questionnaire.

50. It was noted that whether to establish a state-reporting mechanism needed further consultations. A few delegations noted that regular reports on implementation could be very valuable to facilitate information exchange between countries, even while recognizing that reports are resource-intensive for States to prepare. Several delegations agreed that State replies to the questionnaire should be treated in the same manner and given the same distribution as State reports under human rights instruments. One delegation felt that until a system of periodic reports had been regularised, action on other suggestions to follow up the exercise might be premature.

(c) UNHCR's activities for refugee law promotion, dissemination and training

51. The Director of International Protection referred to document EC/SCP/69 which contained a report on UNHCR's activities in refugee law promotion, dissemination and training during the period July 1990 to July 1991, prepared in response to an Executive Committee request at its thirty-ninth session. He reported at the same time on progress in promoting accession to the international refugee instruments, noting that Romania and Poland had deposited their instruments of accession, becoming the 108th and 109th States Party. He expressed the hope that more States would follow suit.

52. Referring to the background note, a number of delegations commended UNHCR for its work in wide-ranging activities in promotion and training, throughout all the various regions. One delegation suggested targeting national bar associations and refugee lawyers groups for promotion efforts. The generosity of donors in supporting promotion and training programmes was praised. UNHCR was encouraged to continue to develop its activities in this area.